

# FAR FROM THE TREE EXHIBIT

On Monday, 28 July 2008, Ashton and I visited "Far From the Tree, An Evolutionary View of Contemporary Woodturning" exhibit at the Ohio Craft Museum in Columbus, Ohio. If you still have your Spring edition of the *American Woodturner* magazine, an overview written by Jacques Vesery and Kevin Wallace, co-curators, is on pages 42-43. The cover of the magazine features "Second Rocking Bowl" by Hans Weissflog of Germany.

As the brochure states, the exhibit presents a visual history of woodturning's emergence as a vibrant artistic form over the past sixty years. As you may know, Vesery is a leading wood artist with an international reputation. Wallace is an independent curator, author, and Director of the Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts in Ojai, California. The two put the exhibit together to take "a fresh look at the field's roots and the steady expansion of woodturning that has resulted in a bold new approach to contemporary art."

"At the center of the exhibit are pioneering artists Bob Stocksdale, Rude Osolnik, Mel Linquist, James Prestini, and Ed Moulthrop, who focused on the natural beauty of wood by utilizing simple vessel forms, all of whom are now deceased. From that core radiates the work of influential contemporary artists who have expanded the language of the medium in new directions. The works on display feature a broad range of sensibilities, yet are related through their use of wood, lathe and a shared history."

The seven and a half hour road trip over to Columbus, where we stayed with my sister and her husband, certainly was worth the time and effort. To both of us, a number of the relatively limited number of pieces really jumped out at us. To me, the three bowls by Weissflog knocked my socks off. A good sized geometric shape by Stoney Lamar, Michael Lee's abstract form, a real beauty of a flight of fancy by Alain Mailland, a stroll-stopping design by Graeme Priddle, and a truly organic form by Betty Scarpino strongly stood out to us.

In trying to verbalize as best I can such an overwhelming visual experience, I found the following useful introduction to Turning Wood into Art, the theme of the Jane and Arthur Mason Collection in the Mint Museum in Charlotte, NC:

"Design in Woodturning can be defined in several ways. There is the basic and inherent design of symmetry and roundness that results from the use of the lathe. Alternately, there is the application and refinement of existing design styles, such as Scandinavian Modern in the works of Rude Osolnik and Bob Stocksdale. Precision and minimalist esthetic characterizes another type of design in which the form is cleansed of its woodiness. This can be seen in the works of Hans Weissflog, Maria Van Kestern, Merryll Sanlan, and James Prestini. Conversely, nature's irregularities have also created a design vocabulary for woodturning. Mel and Mark Lindquist stand as examples of this school of thought in which the burl, root and knot--the unusable portions for furniture makers--are

elevated to fine art. Lastly, many designs are created to exploit and enhance the grain in woodturning surfaces.”

To top off our visit, we had the pleasure of meeting Andi Wolfe, whose 'Remembrance' sculpture is on the back of the Spring *American Woodturner*. I had exchanged e-mails earlier with Andi, who is a professor at The Ohio State University in the botany and zoology department. The sculpture is made from a very mature Gingko tree that had to be removed for much needed renovation of the old B&Z Building. Andi had noted in her magazine narrative that the renovation last year was the first time the creaky old building had been through a major repair since the Kennedy Administration. After reading this, my light bulb came on--I was in a freshman Botany 101 class in that building in 1962 and I remembered that cluster of trees, some 45 years younger! Andi met us at the exhibit and was most gracious in inviting us over to her house to see her collection and her studio. She's a most remarkable woman--a mother of three, an artist in wood of the first order, an accomplished musician and a full-time professor. And the best was yet to come...as we left, she asked if I wanted a block of that Gingko. Do I even have to tell you what my answer was?